UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE
SPEICHERSTADT AND KONTORHAUS DISTRICT WITH CHILEHAUS
KONTORHAUS DISTRICT WITH CHILEHAUS

The Kontorhaus district, immediately adjacent to the Speicherstadt, made architectural history as the first dedicated office district on the European continent. The term Kontorhaus refers to the rental offices and jointly owned buildings of the port-dependent companies. Built in the 1920s and 1930s, the district became the place of business for large trading companies from where they administered the flow of goods while keeping a constant eye on the warehouses and their valuable merchandise.

The dark brick façades surrounding Burchardplatz form the heart of the district. While the facades of the Speicherstadt and the Chilehaus still display expressionist shapes, the simple workmanship at Millionen, in particular at Chilehaus, indicates the transition to the style of New Objectivity. The highlight of the ensemble is a true "pinnacle" of architecture: the Kontorhaus, with its peak reminiscent of a ship's prow, the Chilehaus quickly became a national attraction, and to this day is considered an icon of Brick Expressionism. The building's S-shaped, ornate curved façade is composed of around 4.8 million bricks across 12 stories – all worked by hand. The name "Chilehaus" refers to the buildings owner and businessman Henry B. Sloman. The impoverished Hamburg citizen made a fortune in Olie-trading in saltwater, returning to his home town a rich merchant.

To this day the Kontorhaus district is a flourishing business district and home to numerous companies. While paternosters and ornate spiral staircases in the interior of the buildings are reminiscent of the beginnings of modern office life, the course of time the district has been endowed by numerous restaurants, galleries and markets.
Hamburg's accession to the German Customs Union in 1888 signalled the end of customs exemption for the former sovereign city state. Only a small free port area remained for merchants to store, process and ship their goods free of duties. This is where today's Hamburger Hafen und Logistik AG (HHLA) built up a “city of warehouses” with over 300,000 square metres of storage area on thick oak piles between 1885 and 1927. The goods were hauled up from the cargo ships anchored below the warehouses and stored in the lofts. The warehouses' skeleton construction made it possible to create open spaces and maintain stable indoor climates, which helped to preserve even the most sensitive and valuable of goods.

That functionality and an attractive appearance are not mutually exclusive is demonstrated by the Neo-Gothic red-brick façades of the Speicherstadt.

The historic Speicherstadt and the Kontorhaus district with the legendary Chilehaus are brickwork symbols of the rise of Hamburg as a trading metropolis. Today the districts, preserved in their entirety, are the pride of Hamburg: In 2015 they were designated a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site – an outstanding ensemble of maritime warehouses and modern office buildings of exceptional universal value.

By the end of the 19th century industrialisation and global trade reached unprecedented levels, fundamentally changing the face of Hamburg. Up until this time merchants lived, worked and stored goods in their town houses. However, in order for Hamburg to join the German Customs Union, these areas of life had to be separated. As the quantity of goods increased, they had to be handled more efficiently. Whole districts were created, solely devoted to the business of import and export – the birth of the Speicherstadt and Kontorhaus district.

This is how the world's largest warehouse complex at the time and Europe's first district constructed exclusively for office buildings were established – and, with them, the conditions that enabled Hamburg to climb to the pinnacle of world trade. These buildings with their impressive clinker façades – made from the brickwork so typical of Northern Germany – have shaped the face of the metropolis on the Elbe. UNESCO has now honoured these two fully preserved districts by including them in the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Welcome to a lively cultural heritage site, which finds its modern counterpart in the Elbphilharmonie and the HafenCity!

SPEICHERSTADT

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